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SUBJECT: VIOLENT UNREST OVER VACATED SWEDISH MOSQUE

¶1. (U) Summary: In an immigrant neighborhood in Malmo, on December 15, police forcibly vacated three Muslim protesters for illegally squatting in an office space formerly used as an Islamic cultural center for 15 years. The youth were protesting the decision by city officials not to renew the lease. In reaction to the removal, a protest group converged on the site and, for the past four days, violent disturbances have occurred. End summary.

Muslim Sit-In

¶2. (U) Last summer Malmo city officials in southern Sweden decided not to renew the basement lease held for 15 years by various Muslim groups, including the Islamic Cultural Association. The site, used mainly as a cultural center and mosque, is in the immigrant-majority neighborhood of Rosengard. The Association vacated the office space, but on the lease's expiration date, November 24, a trio of teenagers began a "sit-in," peacefully demanding that city officials reinstate the lease. The Association claimed the end of the lease was discriminatory, while city officials claimed the space was needed for a center to educate immigrants about Swedish tenant laws and norms.

¶3. (U) The sit-in was reported to the police the first week of December, and on December 15 riot police used dogs to clear the three protesters from the rental basement and took them into custody for trespassing. On the same day a group of protestors gathered outside the building to voice their objections to the police action.

Protests Turn Violent

¶4. (U) The disturbances took a violent turn on December 17 when dozens of fires were set in neighborhood garbage bins and protestors aimed stones, bottles and fireworks at the riot police. The police stated the majority of the disruptive protesters are autonomous groups, such as "Anti-Fascism Action", that came to Rosengard in response to the police action. Seventeen people, mostly youth, have been detained so far and tensions in the area remain high at the time of this cable.

¶5. (U) Comment: Violent protests in Sweden are extremely rare. As the protests are occurring in one the densest immigrant pockets in Sweden, there is a chance they could grow in scale. We will continue to monitor the situation.

SILVERMAN